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Parental heads of households and high school students in 2 rural Illinois counties were studied to determine their respective attitudes toward several minority groups using the Bogardus Social Distance Scale as the primary attitudinal measure. A parental sample of 1096 households and a sample of 738 students were independently drawn. The two samples provided 66 instances of overlap response from heads of households and high school students from the same family. It was hypothesized that a youth subculture or "contra-culture" serves as a more important socializing agent in forming attitudes of students toward minority groups than does parental attitude and influence. Chi-square and correlational techniques were utilized in analyzing the obtained data. Results indicated that there was little evidence of "contra-culture" influence and that student attitudes toward minority groups were in general the same as those held by the adults. It was concluded that strong family influence on children's attitudes toward minority groups still existed in these 2 rural areas. Related information is contained in ED 024 514. (EV)

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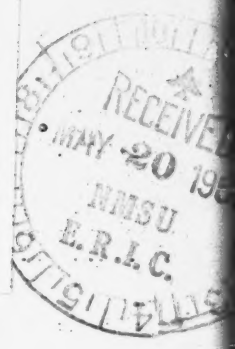

PARENTAL INFLUENCE, YOUTH CONTRA-CULTURE, AND RURAL ADOLESCENT ATTITUDES TOWARD MINORITY GROUPS[1]

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INTRODUCTION

The decline in number of functions performed by rural families and the rise in extended education of rural youth at consolidated schools would seem to offer the conditions for the development of a youth sub-culture. Such a youth subculture may be termed a "contra-culture" insofar as it supports attitudes contrary to those of the adult culture. We report here an attempt to ascertain whether there is evidence of an emerging youth contra-culture in a rural Midwestern Area.

Work in three relatively distinct areas of sociology suggests that the development of a youth contra-culture may be of importance in rural as well as in urban areas. Sociologists dealing with rural families have tended to emphasize the transformation of the traditional, closely knit rural family to a form more closely resembling its urban counterpart.

Burgess et.al. (1963) have described the changes manifest in the rural family today as a transition from an institutionalized "familism" in which the individual's allegiance and resources were committed first to family needs and goals to a "companionship" system in which the relative independence of the family unit is shattered as interaction with modernizing and urbanizing influences is increased, particularly among the young.

Rural sociologists generally emphasize the same changes. Rogers (1960:170ff) emphasizes the delimitation of the functions of farm families today and underscores his suggestion that they are drifting toward individualism by noting that they may spend even less time together than urban families. Taylor

and Jones (1964:344ff.) characterize the present day farm family as manifesting a radical reduction of the "social space" it occupies in the lives of its members.

Thus, rural American society increasingly approximates the conditions Eisenstadt (1956:54) specified as leading to the formation of age-homogeneous groups. Where family and kinship units cannot ensure, or even impede, the attainment of full social status by their members, the important institutionalized roles of the system become independent of the family. Youth are pressed together because of the need for learning the kinds of role performances which will satisfy universalistic standards for determining reward allocations in the system; standards which are alien to their parents.

The development of such a phenomenon among American adolescents has been noted by several sociologists. Gottlieb and Ramsey (1964:29) argued there was consensus among observers that an emergent adolescent sub-culture existed due to the protracted educational experiences made necessary by technological change. Certainly the argument was supported by Coleman (1961) when he suggested that the most important interactions of adolescents were staged in isolation from adults. Also, Smith (1962) identified several areas of serious youth-adult conflict.

However, Schwartz and Merten (1967) and Snyder (1966) demonstrated that youth sub-cultures may not be primarily contra-cultures and that they certainly cannot be characterized by a high degree of internal solidarity and conformity. Hence, the prevelance of a youth contra-culture is problematic.

Few attempts to apply the concept of youth contra-culture to rural youth have been made. However, in one extensive effort, a study of 8,000 Pennsylvania youth, Bealer and Willits (1961) found no evidence for the emergence of a youth contra-culture. The youth in their study accepted the

family as their most important reference group and disagreement between parents and youth developed over questions of when recognition of maturity should take place. Such conflicts indicate acceptance of and eagerness to participate in adult society rather than a rejection of it.

A crucial element in the demonstration of the presence of a youth contra-culture is the extent to which the attitudes of rural youth are derived from their families as opposed to their peers. If assessments of the changing rural family are accurate, one would expect rural youth to have different attitudes than adults; even their own parents. Following this suggestion we have examined the degree of correspondence between a sample of rural high school students and one of their parents with respect to attitudes toward several minority groups.

METHODOLOGY

The relative importance of family and peer groups in the development of adolescent attitudes and behavior has usually been determined by asking adolescents who affected their decisions on certain matters, with little or no independent testing of the reference groups for actual similarity of attitudes. The analysis that follows is based on two independent sets of data concerning students' and parents' attitudes toward minority groups.

The parents' data were collected as part of a household survey based on an area probability sample of two rural counties, one undergoing industrialization and the other a relatively stable and prosperous rural community centered around a county-seat service city. In all, 1096 households were included in the sample. The youth data were obtained from questionnaire responses by students in consolidated high schools in the two counties. Seven hundred and thirty-eight students completed schedules. There was overlap in the two surveys in terms of the families serving as respondents:

that is, parallel data were available for heads of household and high school students from the same families. Seventy such instances of overlap were identified. Of these, four had to be dropped from the analysis because more than five percent of the relevant data was incomplete. Thus, for 66 families we had independent responses from students and the head of their household on the same questionnaire items.

A Bogardus Social Distance Scale was included in both survey instruments. The respondents were asked to indicate whether they would admit Latin Americans, Germans, Negroes, and Jews to employment in their occupation; to citizenship in their country; to close kinship by marriage; to their street as neighbors; as visitors to their country; and to their club as personal chums.

Formation of attitudes toward these minority groups seems to be particularly significant to American concerns. Therefore, adolescents presumably are under pressure from both peers and family to formulate attitudes toward these groups. This situation represents a possibility for contradictory socialization between the peer group and the family.

Typically, parent-youth attitudinal studies have directed attention to attitudes regarding distinctly adolescent behaviors such as dress, music, dating patterns, and use of automobiles. Although these kinds of concerns are likely points of conflict between parents and their children, little is known about competing peer and parental influence on more socially relevant attitudes.

Our analysis was guided by the general assumption that a youth subculture serves as an important socializing agent and when the norms and attitudes in the subculture are contrary to adult standards we may speak of a youth

contra-culture. Three indicators of the existence of such a contra-culture were used. First, a significant difference between the mean social distance score of the students and the heads of their households would indicate that the students hold a different view of the desirable social distance between themselves and minority groups than do their parents. Second, a distribution of scores with a smaller variance among the students than among the heads of household would indicate contra-culture pressures for attitude conformity. Finally, low correlation of student-head of household attitudes would indicate the relative uninfluential role of the family in the formation of adolescent attitudes toward minority groups. Failure to observe these characteristics would suggest the absence of a youth contra-culture.

Table 1 about here

None of the indicators gives evidence of such a contra-culture. The absence of a significant difference between the means of the heads of household and student scores indicates that both desire much the same level of social distance.

The absence of significant differences in variance of scores indicates that adolescent peers are no more in agreement regarding social distance preferences than are their parents. The students reflect fairly accurately the attitudes of their parents.

Finally, the correlations of student-head of household social distance scores are significant for three of four minority groups - Germans, Negroes and Jews. The evidence seems to indicate a

relatively strong family influence and the absence of an adolescent contra-culture in these two rural areas.

Thus, generalizations about the decline of familism and the loss of functions by the rural family should not be extended to the socialization of attitudes of rural youth. Rural high school students may spend less time with their parents than formerly. They may be exposed to potentially attitude-changing, urban types of experiences and influences through education and occupational endeavors. But the evidence we found indicates the continued importance of parents in determining their children's attitudes toward minority groups. As Bealer and Willits (1961) indicate, the concept of youth contra-culture cannot easily be extended to rural society. For rural youth, basic attitudes may remain "traditional" and much like that of their parents.

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Table 1. Social distance scale score means, variances and correlations for Heads of Households and Students.

	$\bar{x}$	σ	Heads of Household-Student r
Latin Americans			
Head of Household	8.9	3.57	.17
Student	8.3	3.25	
Germans			
Head of Household	7.1	2.96	.47*
Student	7.4	2.65	
Negroes			
Head of Household	10.8	3.44	.41*
Student	10.1	3.41	
Jews			
Head of Household	7.8	3.28	.41*
Student	9.2	3.58	

* Correlation Coefficient statistically significant.